

Honoring our Veterans
Rep. Lloyd Doggett

Veterans Day celebrates our freedom. We can celebrate this day only because of the sacrifices of generations of young Americans. A nation which fails to remember those who defend freedom will not find itself long remembered. What keeps our flag flying is not a strong breeze, but the strong resolve of those present-day heroes serving in our armed services

Because we ask so much of our veterans, we should respond in deeds as well as words. Congress is on course this year to provide the largest increase in veterans' health care funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration -- \$6 Billion more in 2008, which is \$3.8 Billion more than what the President proposed.

This unprecedented increase for veterans' health care services is all about respect -- respect for the unselfish sacrifice of our troops and our veterans and their families. It is also about our Nation's security, because we cannot attract the best and brightest to serve in tomorrow's military if we break faith with those who served yesterday.

Support for our troops does not begin on the battlefield and it must not end there. Our duty to those who wear the flag on their uniform is not over when their service is over. Congress has recognized that with passage of the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Act. Currently, only veterans who served in active service prior to 1977 are eligible for low-interest home loans from the proceeds of Qualified Veterans Mortgage Bonds. With the HEART Act, we close this gap.

The HEART Act removes this service restriction, expanding eligibility for these low-interest home loans to all qualified veterans regardless of when they served. Through this program, Texas veterans will be eligible for below-market home loans of up to \$325,000. Those who fight to keep us safe in our homes deserve a chance at a home of their own. As they pay the price to build our great democracy, we can afford the price of building a foundation of home ownership.

Not just for their military service, but also for the role that many play as teachers, professionals, volunteers, role-models and parents and grandparents, our community is made richer by the service of our distinguished veterans. We take this opportunity to pledge ourselves to the fulfillment of the obligations we owe to those who have defended our country